

PREPARATION FOR LESSON: Read 1 Thessalonians 1 - 5**BACKGROUND**

Thessalonica was located on the military road 100 miles southwest of Philippi. Being a seaport, it was a center of trade and commerce. It naturally developed into the largest city of Macedonia (200,000) and became the capital.

Paul, Silas and Timothy first went to Thessalonica on the 2nd missionary trip. For 3 weeks Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue. Then he taught Gentiles in the home of a man named Jason. Many believed. He taught in detail about salvation and the Christian life. Before he could give them all the details about the return of Jesus, Jewish leaders became jealous of his success and started a riot. Paul and his team were forced to leave town and go 50 miles south to Berea. Jewish leaders followed them and stirred up persecution again. Paul went south by himself to Athens and left Silas and Timothy to help the new believers. When they joined him a little later, they told how Jews were continuing to persecute the Thessalonians.

Paul is concerned about their faith and their relationship to him. But if he returns, the believers will be in more danger. So he sends Timothy to encourage and teach them, while he goes south to Corinth.

After a couple of months, Timothy arrives in Corinth to say the believers are continuing in their faith in spite of opposition. Because of Paul's teaching, they are waiting for Jesus to return (the parousia). But there is also sadness because some of the church members have died since Paul was with them. They think the ones who died will be left out when Jesus returns.

Paul writes immediately. He expresses joy at the firmness of their faith; he answers the lies of the false teachers; he gives them further teaching about the return of Jesus. 1 Thessalonians is his very first letter to any of the churches and is written from Corinth about 51 A.D.

THEME Teaching about the return of Jesus

He will come from heaven; all believers will get resurrection bodies and meet Him in the air, to be alongside Him. He will then take us to His home to live with Him forever. It could happen at anytime.

OUTLINE**The teaching of Jesus' return motivates believers ...**

...to faithfulness	1
...to ministry	2
...to holiness	3:1 - 4:12
...to experience comfort	4:13-18
...to spiritual maturity	5

DEFINITIONS

Parousia: 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23 The word means "to be alongside Jesus." It is translated *coming, comes*.

Caught up, gathered, taken up in 4:17 means *to take by force, catch up, seize*.

The Greek word is *harpazo*; the Latin is *rapere*; the English of the 1600s is *rapture*.

Theologians chose the single word "rapture" to describe the entire concept of Jesus' return in the air.

EXPLANATIONS

Chapters 1-5 Every chapter mentions Jesus' return: 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23

Chpt. 1 describes their life of faith. Verse 3 is matched with verse 9 to give a fuller picture.

Their work of faith was turning to God from idols. It was the action that expressed their faith.

Their labor of love was serving the living God.

Their endurance of certainty was waiting for Jesus' return.

Chpt. 1:4 *Brothers loved by God* was a phrase used in synagogues by Jews for each other.

Chosen/elect was a phrase used by Jews about their ministry to give God's message to the world.

Paul, a Jewish rabbi takes words used by Jews, for Jews and applies them to Gentile believers.

Because of faith in Jesus, **they** also are brothers loved by God; **they** also have been chosen for ministry.

Chpt. 1:10 *Jesus, who rescues/delivers us from the coming wrath*.

The time of God's wrath (judgment) and the Day of the Lord are phrases from the Old and New Testament that refer to the same event. It is 7 years of God's judgment on the earth when Satan is allowed to have his kingdom with his man in control. Paul says Jesus is returning to rescue believers from that judgment.

Chpt. 2:19-20

The believers in Thessalonica will be Paul's crown or gold medal at the Reviewing Stand of Jesus (Bema)



EXPLANATIONS

Chpt. 3:12-13 Paul's prayer for the believers, paraphrased to capture the meaning.

I am praying that when you stand alongside Jesus, your daily holiness will have moved closer to the holiness God has already put on your account. Sanctification means to become more holy.

Holiness in sexual love: no sexual activity outside of marriage. 4:3-8

God's definition of marriage in Scripture is always and only between a man and woman.

Holiness in brotherly love

Minding our own business; not living off of others; not letting others live off of us. 4:11-12

Chpt. 3:1 to 4:12 We are to make choices that will close the gap between the holiness that God put on our account and the holiness we have in our daily experience.

Chpt. 4:13 *Those who have no certainty.* A first century AD pagan inscription from Thessalonica said,

After death, no reviving; after the grave, no meeting again.

Chpt. 4:13-18 Jesus will return and be in the sky where we can see Him.

Before anything happens to us who are living, the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected. They will be perfect, resurrection bodies like Jesus had in His resurrection. Their new body will be united with their soul and spirit, so they are a complete person. This is a resurrection of only those who are believers since the day of Pentecost. Vs. 16, *the dead in Christ - His Body*.

After dead believers get their resurrection bodies, living believers will have their bodies changed without having to die. According to 1 Corinthians 15, all of this will happen in a split second - as fast as the eye can blink. Then suddenly, these resurrection bodies will be pulled from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. He will lead us to His home so we can be with Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit forever.

Chpt. 5 How to have spiritual maturity in our personal lives and in the life of the local church.

- Encourage one another to live like believers and build each other up - the first step to maturity. Vs. 9

- Respect spiritual leaders: they are over us, but under the direction of the Holy Spirit. "in the Lord"

If leaders abuse authority, are not obeying the Lord or acting like the Lord, we cannot accept their leadership.

- Live in peace: stand together against opposition. But if there is wrong teaching/action, it must be dealt with.

- Warn the idle: living off of others is unacceptable; enabling others to be irresponsible is also wrong.

- Encourage those who are discouraged because of persecution, grief or problems.

- Help the weak: be supportive of those who are physically weak or weak in faith, but do not become a crutch.

- Be patient with everyone: don't expect everyone to overcome problems the way you can.

But patience never means to accept wrong behavior. Boundaries must be set.

- Be joyful, prayerful, thankful: "joy" means *inner stability*.

We can have inner stability in times of chaos when thru prayer, we thank God for who He is and what He can do.

- Stop saying *no* to the Holy Spirit; stop ignoring God's word spoken by others.

If we knowingly choose things that are unholy, we will feel inner conflict, conviction of the Holy Spirit. We are to stop blocking or ignoring that conviction of the Holy Spirit.

- Test everything; accept what is good; avoid what is evil.

Since we cannot be sure when others are speaking from God or from themselves, we must test their words.

We are to accept teaching that is from God (what is good); we are to avoid it if it is not from God (evil).

We know it is from God if it agrees with what God has already said in His Word.

Chpt. 5:23 *May you respond, so God can bring holiness into all of your life - body, soul and spirit, so that by the time you are alongside Jesus, you will have come to maturity; you will have become all that God created you to be.*

APPLICATION Jesus is returning

It has always been taught as imminent; it could happen at any time. But since Jesus has not returned for 2000 years, why did Paul teach believers it could happen in their day? Why should we believe it could be tonight or tomorrow, when it could be delayed until next month or 5 years from now?

If we knew it would not be for 5 years, we would put off doing anything in our life until at least the 4th year.

God wants this belief to be so real and present, that it motivates us every day to faithfulness, ministry, holiness and spiritual maturity and brings comfort in time of grief.

The return of Jesus is not just a hope; it is a certainty that we are waiting for. It could happen at any time.

Can we say with John the apostle, ***Come quickly, Lord Jesus.***

